



# **NATIONAL FORESTS IN NORTH • CAROLINA**

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## **NEWS • RELEASE**

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### **Firefighters Continue to Battle Linville Gorge Wildfires**

Nearly 300 federal and state firefighters continued to battle two wildfires on the Pisgah National Forest near Linville Gorge in Burke County. As of 6 pm Tuesday the fires had burned over 1,200 acres and were considered only about 15 percent contained. The fires continue to burn entirely on national forest lands and pose no direct threat to adjacent private lands or homes. To ensure public safety, the U.S. Forest Service has closed the Linville Gorge Wilderness to the public until further notice.

Firefighters used air tankers and helicopters Tuesday to drop water and retardants on the Dobson Knob fire, which at one point threatened to jump fire lines put in earlier in the week. The Dobson Knob fire has burned approximately 500 acres to date.

The Shortoff Mountain fire, still at about 700 acres, continued to slowly burn downhill on the east side of Linville River within the Linville Gorge Wilderness. The fire was burning in dead and down table mountain pine and mountain laurel and flame lengths averaged three to six feet today. The steep, rugged terrain in Linville Gorge Wilderness made direct attack on the fire extremely difficult.

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The Forest Service does not have an estimate of when these two fires will be contained. Firefighters plan to keep building and securing control lines around the perimeter of the fires. They also plan to do “back burning” on the Shortoff Mountain fire later in the week to clear out combustible fuels inside the control lines and make it more difficult for the wildfires to jump the lines.

“Unfortunately the thunderstorms that have moved through our area the last two days have missed Linville Gorge,” said U.S. Forest Service spokesman Terry Seyden. “We have gotten only a few sprinkles over the fires and the forest remains extremely dry.”

The hot, dry weather the last two months in western North Carolina has created unusually high fire danger conditions for this late in the season. “The extended drought and a buildup of dead pines killed by southern pine beetle outbreaks have combined to cause these fires to burn much hotter and spread faster than what we normally see”, said U.S. Forest spokesman Terry Seyden. “Dead hemlock trees killed by the hemlock woolly adelgid are also adding fuel to the fire,” Seyden added.

The public can check for updated fire information at the National Forests in North Carolina website <http://www.cs.unca.edu/nfsnc>.

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